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ABSTRACT

Since 1995, UNESCO and the Averroes Foundation have collaborated to develop early childhood education programs. This report describes Averroes intervention programs currently used in the Netherlands with young at-risk children. Following a Foreword which describes various UNESCO early childhood activities, the report is divided into six parts. Part 1 provides background on early intervention program development in the Netherlands. Part 2 describes how intermediary agencies can connect effectively with researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and families. Part 3 describes the Averroes programs: (1) "Instapje," to improve the quality of caregiver-child interactions; (2) "Klimrek," a home-visit program to stimulate verbal interaction between parents and children; (3) "Spel ann Huis," a home-based program to stimulate play development in 1- to 4-year-olds; (4) "Opstapje," to facilitate transitions from home to elementary school for disadvantaged 2- to 4-year-olds; (5) "Opstap Opnieuw," a home-based extra-curriculum for disadvantaged 4- to 6-year-old children and their parents; (6) "Overstap," focusing on collaboration between school, parents, and children during the process of learning to read; (7) "Stap door," a continuation of the Overstap program for second and fifth graders; (8) "Stap rond," a parent education program for caregivers of children from birth to 6 years of age; and (9) "Kaleidoscoop," the Dutch version of the American High/Scope program. Part 4 discusses the limited value in using educational models as the basis for program development and presents key principles for developing intervention programs. Part 5 concerns lessons Averroes has learned in disseminating programs to large numbers. Part 6

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discusses the relationship between home-based and center-based intervention strategies. (KB)

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Early Intervention: Examples of Practice

Averroès Programmes for Children - an experience to be shared

Joyce Cordus, Averroès Foundation - European Training Centre

& Nico van Oudenhoven, International Child Development Initiatives

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U N E S C O

Action Research in Family and Early Childhood

October 1997

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UNESCO Activities in Early Childhood

Principle for action

Learning begins at birth. *(Article 5 - 1990 Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All)*

Early Childhood Care and Education is an integral part of basic education and represents the first and essential step in achieving the goals of Education-for-All. Recent world conferences testify to a growing appreciation of the crucial importance of the child's earliest years, and of the need to support families and communities in their role as the child's most influential educator. The learning capacity and value orientations of children are largely determined by the time the child reaches the age of formal schooling. For this reason, any sustained effort in Education for All must set targets and programmes for early childhood and attempt to raise the life-skills level of families.

Improving children's health and nutrition is necessary, but increasingly, in a situation where fourteen out of fifteen of the world's children survive until the age of one, governments and civil society are turning their attention to the psycho-social and cognitive development of children. Well conceived quality early childhood programmes help meet the diverse needs of young children during the crucial early years of life, enhance their readiness for schooling, have a positive and permanent influence on later schooling achievement. In addition, countries that succeed in mobilizing local government, municipalities, communities and voluntary organizations in the care and education of young children have been able to decentralise and innovate in their educational systems and, at the same time, make an important contribution toward population information and family education.

Goals and objectives

Within this context, UNESCO intervenes at various levels:

- at the interagency level, by participating in United Nations or other international initiatives in favour of children and families;
- at the intergovernmental level, by encouraging governments to integrate early childhood and family education programmes in their long-term social and economic planning;
- through technical assistance in the design, development and implementation of integrated early childhood programmes; as well as contributing to the improvement of the child development skills of parents and caregivers by encouraging child care information and education services, and community-based family support programmes;
- by acting as a networking centre and clearing-house on information about early childhood care and education systems, organizations, policies, programmes and activities.

UNESCO's Early Childhood and Family Education Unit

UNESCO's *Early Childhood and Family Education (ECF) Unit* co-ordinates research, activities and initiatives undertaken by UNESCO in early childhood care and education, parent and family education, and in favour of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It seeks to:

- improve access to early childhood care and education by making such programmes more widely available and accessible, and improving school-readiness;
- support family education and policy formulation by encouraging the participation and promoting the role of families and communities in basic education programmes;

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- improve the content of early childhood programmes, in particular their design and quality.
- redirect and strengthen early childhood training programmes;
- strengthen the information base on early childhood by improving the availability and quality of information, research and data on young children and their families;
- promote legislation on behalf of children and families, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child, through awareness raising and advocacy;
- collaborate in artistic, intellectual and cultural events promoting reflection on childhood and family issues.

Early Childhood Interventions

With the help of its specialized services, its roster of consultants, its partnership with sister agencies of the United Nations - in particular UNICEF and WHO - and the co-operation of major institutes and NGOs, UNESCO provides various services to its Member States, UN Agencies, foundations, organizations and individuals working in favour of children and families. Some of its activities include:

- supporting early childhood development/family education programmes in the Middle East, the Pacific, Latin America and South East Asia;
- publishing information and research results on early childhood topics, such as:
  - *Enhancing the Skills of Early Childhood Trainers*, a training pack for the training of trainers produced with the Bernard van Leer Foundation
  - *Toward a Fair Start for Children: Programming for Early Childhood Care and Developement in the Developing World* by Dr Robert Myers, already published in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Indonedian, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish and Thai.
- creating graduate-level diplomas in early childhood in selected universities in Brazil, with the Centre International de l'Enfance;
- sponsoring sub-regional training workshops for administrators in policy and organization of informal early childhood development systems in the Pacific, Africa and the Middle East;
- strengthening or establishing regional Early Childhood Co-operating Centres in Europe and Francophone Africa;
- undertaking a national inventory of early childhood resources in Burkina Faso to reinforce national capacity and potential in the care and education of young children.

Family Education and Early Childhood Development

Systemic early child development programmes are an excellent investment for States, in that they raise significantly the health and educational levels of young children and allow women to enter the labour market. Children, however, always need the security and orientation which the home provides, nor should it be forgotten that societies are founded on the quality of the homes and families of which they are composed. Family education

- provides parents with the necessary knowledge and skills to raise their children successfully;
- builds up self-reliance, networking and social consciousness among parents.

Member States have much to gain from promoting family education. In situations where it is impossible to set up early childhood, centre-based programmes funded by the State, excellent child care and education can be provided through educating parents and supporting their initiatives at community level. UNESCO recommends State support for family education not only as a fruitful investment in children but also as a means of raising the educational level of a country as a whole. In a context dominated by rapid social change and by the expansion of

scientific and technological knowledge, parent education is a first step toward supporting community development and education. In the past three years, the Organization has supported over twenty different projects in Member States worldwide focusing on the development and education of families and young children.

Children's Rights Initiatives

The Articles of the Convention which present a particular challenge to UNESCO are those relating to education (Articles 27, 28 and 29) and culture (Articles 12, 13, 14, 17, 28, 29, 30 and 31). UNESCO promotes the Convention on the Rights of the Child by :

- acting as a focal point for enquiries concerning the Convention, sending out literature and attempting to attend the more important meetings on the Convention convened by the United Nations and NGOs;
- providing assistance to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in monitoring the Convention, in particular as it relates to education and culture.
- helping to translate the Convention into national languages.
- contracting original materials on the Convention, especially publications and booklets prepared for or by young children.
- assisting governments and non-governmental organizations in publishing children's versions of the Convention and guidebooks for teachers;
- co-operating with UNICEF on matters pertaining to the Convention, within the framework of early childhood education.

Early Childhood Information/Documentation Activities

To create opportunities for institutions and individuals to learn about each other's needs and actions, enhance information exchange on early childhood, and build up active relationships to benefit young children and their families, UNESCO:

- collects, compiles and disseminates basic information on early childhood care and education systems, organizations and curricula.
- maintains a data bank of early childhood care and education information.
- produces practical directories, publications, briefs and reports on early childhood care and education systems, organizations, curricula or policies.
- participates in interactive early childhood and children's rights activities on Internet, as a member of the *Children's House in Cyberspace* initiative.
- provides input into, and support for, selected professional journals and reviews, such as the Interagency Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development's *Coordinator's Notebook*.

Further enquiries

Information on UNESCO's early childhood actions can also be consulted on Internet in Children's House at http://childhouse.uio.no/YCFWPAGE/index.htm or in UNESCO's site at http://unesco.uneb.edu/educprog/index.html

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The UNESCO Averroès Foundation initiative

Since May 1995, UNESCO and the Averroès Foundation have worked closely together in the development of early childhood education. An important aspect of this co-operation has been the role of the Averroès Foundation as an active partner in UNESCO's Co-operating Centres Programme for Early Child Development.

To give impetus to this programme, in early 1997, the Averroès Foundation established, in association with UNESCO, the Averroès European Training Centre for Early Child Development and the Family. The Centre will become a mobilizing force for the young child and the family environment in the European context; to provide technical assistance to selected countries, to convene meetings of practitioners, specialists and policy makers; to engage in intensive training of trainers.

The Averroès European Training Centre offers a range of courses, including an annual two-month course and various short training courses. The two-month course is geared towards programme specialists, policy makers and practitiones working at intermediary levels. Discussion leaders and trainers will be drawn from the international early child development community. Participants will be given ample room for theoretical reflection, sharing of experience, as well as exposure to practice. Topics that will be dealt with during the two-month course are:

- parent-child interaction;
- home-visits and group meetings;
- family and parental support;
- home-based programmes;
- children and families from unaccessible groups;
- quality of centres;
- training of paraprofessionals;
- educational materials and children's books;
- visions of childhood;
- policy making in early child development and parent education;
- local integrated policy methods;
- networking;
- fund raising.

Further enquiries

Information on the Averroès Foundation and the European Training Centre can also be consulted on Internet at http://www.averroes.nl .

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Early Intervention: Examples of Practice

Averroès Programmes for Children - an experience to be shared

I. A decade of working in Early Child Development: experiences to be shared

This document describes nine programmes for children currently used in the Netherlands by the Averroès Foundation. These programmes have been designed to offer support to children and their families. They are aimed at children who, without this support, may fail to flourish, may not succeed at school and, in later life, may suffer social exclusion. They are *examples of practice*[1], offering concrete illustrations of efforts of non-formal activities which benefit children. These illustrations may be useful to others in designing, upgrading or expanding their programmes.

The Averroès programmes have much in common with other intervention programmes currently operating in many parts of the world. Most, if not all, of the underlying principles have their roots in this world-wide experience, and have almost universal validity. These include the holistic development of children, the empowerment of families and communities, and building on available knowledge and local strengths.

Simple as these principles may sound, translating them into everyday practice appears to be a massive undertaking. This is especially true when the challenge is to fulfill the policy-makers' dream. A policy-maker's dream is to reach

- large numbers of children
- in an effective manner
- in a short period of time
- with a low budget.

It is worth emphasizing that this dream is increasingly being put forward as a policy objective by government agencies and the international donor community.

Over the last ten years, the Averroès Foundation has built on existing intervention programmes, adapted and modified others, and pioneered new approaches. To upgrade and improve programme activities and to keep them relevant, local inputs are valued and encouraged. A delicate balance and dynamic interaction is maintained between Averroès, local stakeholders, community mothers, families and children. Furthermore, it continuously monitors, evaluates, and upgrades its programmes. New programmes are constantly being designed. Action research is a built-in practice. Averroès administers the programmes and manages the overall support structure. Annually, some 25,000 children are reached. In addition to 60 core staff at Averroès, more than 1600 people are professionally engaged, whether as community mothers, playgroup leaders, co-ordinators, or teachers.

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[1] *It is now common parlance to speak about 'examples of good practice'. The underlying idea is often that there is sufficient knowledge and experience around to provide solutions to the most burning social issues. This view is partly correct as indeed many proven effective solutions are ignored. It should also be realized, however, that situations change all the time. They demand, as such, new and fresh approaches. It can also be argued that, in addition from learning from 'good practice', learning from 'bad' or just any form of practice could be quite useful.*

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Managerial skills

The managerial skills to run these kinds of programmes are often underestimated. The implementing agency must have the capacity to plan activities, understand complex administrative procedures, implement personnel policies, provide training, draw up budgets and finance operations, offer training, and, simply, run a household. Without these basic skills, a programme is bound to falter.

Three of the four earlier mentioned elements of the policy-makers' dream seem to have been met. Averroès is now capable of reaching out to many children with appropriate services and delivering these within short preparation periods. The fourth element - is the programme low cost? - is debatable. In the Dutch context, these costs are acceptable: on average, the costs[2] amount from US$ 750 to US$ 1,500 per child per year.

These costs could, and, perhaps, should, be reduced. The Averroès Foundation has had the good fortune to be financially and morally supported by the Dutch Ministry of Social Welfare and, as things stand, can still count on this governmental involvement. However, the pressure is now on to market the programmes to individual municipalities which have taken over responsibility from central government to develop, sustain and finance educational activities for young children. They will undoubtedly look critically at the price tag and force Averroès to become even more cost-conscious.

It is likely that key elements of the programme could be implemented in other low-income countries at lower costs. The search for new ways of caring for and educating young children must inevitably entail seeking low-cost approaches. Local authorities and governments may be interested in the healthy development of children, but their continued support will be subject to financial realism. Creativity and courage to break through existing structures are constantly needed to keep costs down. In the Averroès programmes, as everywhere else, paraprofessional workers can take the place of more expensive teachers. The most fascinating aspect of involving mothers - as most paraprofessionals are - is that they are not only cheaper, but also more effective in their work. Economic and educational benefits are here combined.

The outcomes of a decade of Averroès' intensive probing, experimenting, and working at grassroots level are well documented. This experience is not only present in the minds of staff, or in reports and materials; it can also be accessed in the 'field', by visiting families, participating in group sessions, or meeting with community workers or co-ordinators. Over the years, Averroès has become increasingly aware of the complexities and sensitivities involved, and about the ever-changing nature of early intervention work. In discussion with like-minded people and organizations, Averroès finds itself raising issues and asking questions, rather than providing answers. Its experience has increased its capacity and willingness to learn from others and through this to improve its own programmes. It has also learned that other organizations have adopted similar learning styles, and are equally eager to seek out new experience. This document, therefore, should be viewed as a contribution to the debate about practice in Early Child Development, as an effort to share its work, and an open invitation to others to do the same.

At the beginning of 1997, the Averroès Foundation has, in co-operation with UNESCO, established the *Averroès European Training Centre for Early Child Development and the Family*. This Centre offers a range of courses for programme specialists, policy-makers, and implementers whose concern is to improve the situation of young children. Drawing on Averroes' experience, the Centre offers a platform for discussion, learning and exchange.

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[2] *These costs include salaries of professional and paraprofessional staff (coordinator and neighbourhood aide), costs of programme-materials, childcare and overhead (20%). The costs of most of Averroès' home-based programmes vary according to the models in use. The regular model is the most intensive and the most expensive one. Tailor-made programmes often are much cheaper.*

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II. At the interface between practice, policy and research

Practitioners, researchers and policy-makers are not naturally given to co-operation, and frequently operate in distinctly separated worlds. Increasingly, however, a new type of professionals and organizations is emerging. They are capable of operating simultaneously in the areas of research, policy and practice, and have succeeded in bridging the gap between them. Averroès has established itself as such an intermediary, and painstakingly nurtures contacts with these three main groups.

Professional staff within these 'interface' agencies could, perhaps, be described as 'activists who think or thinkers who act', being as they are an interface between theory and practice.

Agencies such as Averroès have access to researchers and policy-makers working 'at a distance', who have extensive networks, high prestige, substantial means and authority to validate experience and knowledge, as well as strong technical expertise. These are all qualities desperately needed by those working 'close to children'. At the same time, these intermediary agencies can easily connect with those close to children and their families. These children and families give meaning to the work, produce new challenges and innovations, and, in the final analysis, show the relevance of any intervention approach or theory.

The range of programmes developed by Averroès is a reflection of the organization's place between research, policy and practice. In close co-operation with representatives of these areas and in synergizing their inputs, services for children are now in place that are effective, accepted by parents, supported by national and local authorities, and informed and validated by research.

III. The family of Averroès programmes

Currently, Averroès oversees nine different programmes. All these programmes seek to improve the quality of education, whether this is at home, in the day-care centre, at pre-school, or at primary school. Some of these programmes have been developed by Averroès staff. Others have been grafted on to existing programmes. People working in the programmes receive extensive support from Averroès staff, consisting of regular group activities, skills training, supervision on the job, feedback meetings, problem-solving sessions, and theme-oriented study days.

The Dutch names of the programmes are given here. In these names the word stap appears frequently. Stap means 'step' in English, and in the programmes the word is used in a metaphorical way. It suggests a sense of movement and gradual attainment of objectives. The programmes are:

1. Instapje *(First steps)*

Instapje is a programme which provides the first step in stimulating communication between parents and children. It is in use on a modest scale with Surinamese and Antillean children between the ages of one and two, and their parents.

The programme primarily aims at improving the quality of the interaction between parent and child, or caregiver and child. It focuses on four dimensions in the parent's behaviour supporting the child in daily interaction:

- emotional support
- respecting the child's autonomy
- providing structure and setting limits on the child's behaviour
- providing information and explaining situations or tasks

Instapje is an intensive programme. A professional implementer visits the family at home on a weekly basis. She demonstrates the range of potential of the play materials and activities. She shows the mother how to adapt to the child's play. The programme is divided into four modules. Each module lasts several weeks and focuses on a theme referring to one of the dimensions of parental behaviour mentioned above.

The objectives of the programme have to become an integral part of the parent's daily life. Therefore, parents are given ample room to reflect upon themes and advice within the framework of their own norms, values and cultural practices.

Research shows that participation in the programme has a positive impact on the quality of parental support. Moreover, children from the experimental group had significantly better scores on the Bayly's development scales than children from the control group.

2. Klimrek (Climbing frame)

Klimrek is the Dutch version of the American 'Mother Child Home Program' developed in the 1960s by Phillis Levenstein. In the Netherlands, the programme serves children aged two to four and their parents. Though the programme lasts two years, its structure and content facilitate parental participation.

Klimrek explicitly aims at stimulating verbal interaction between parent and child, and makes parents aware of their influence on the development of their children. Parents are encouraged and guided in their role as first teachers of their children.

Twice a week, a toy demonstrator pays a half-hour visit to the family. She supports and assists the parent in his or her role as the person primarily responsible for the upbringing of the child. She brings along a toy or booklet the first time she visits the family, and demonstrates to the parent the accompanying activities. These activities will be repeated during the next visit. The most important task of the toy demonstrator is to act as a role-model for the parent. The *Klimrek* material consists of colourful pictures, books and toys which the family keeps.

Evaluation research shows that the programme's methods and materials make it highly suitable for caravan-dwellers and gypsies, as well as for more traditional families from different ethnic and cultural groups.

3. Spel aan Huis *(Play at home)*

Spel aan Huis is a home-based programme whose main objective is to stimulate play development of children between one and four years of age. Older children, if present, are encouraged to join in the play. A secondary goal is to increase the parents' understanding of the value of play and to familiarize them with the play facilities at home and in the neighbourhood. Involving the parent in the child's play activities is a key element of the programme.

Participating families are usually not familiar with the range of stimulating play materials and opportunities available in the home environment. Moreover, they make little use of educational services in the neighbourhood, such as toy-lending facilities and playgroups, because they are not (yet) familiar with them.

Participation in the programme does not require special skills or knowledge on the part of the parents. The strength of the programme lies in its emphasis on flexible home-based activities and its focus on co-operative aspects of play.

A play assistant visits a family each week during the school year. She brings along toys from a toy-lending facility to play with the child(ren). She also initiates games for which no toys are necessary. After some weeks of observation, the play assistant designs a flexible play plan consisting of play activities based on the play experience of the family, and replacing an established curriculum. These activities can be carried out with one or more children in the family, gradually involving the parents as well.

Spel aan Huis, a programme primarily staffed by trainees, serves as an effective impulse towards other more structured programmes for children and parents. The programme has also proven to be very suitable for families who need more intensive care and support.

4. Opstapje *(Leg-up)*

The general objective of *Opstapje* is to facilitate the transition from home to the Dutch elementary school for two to four year old children from disadvantaged backgrounds. To achieve this objective, the programme concretely aims at stimulating certain aspects of mother-child interaction. Therefore, goals have been formulated for the mother on the one hand and for the child on the other.

The most important goal for the mother is to stimulate the mother-child interaction by broadening the responsive instruction behaviour of the mother. 'Messages' for the mother, formulated in the form of concrete behaviour, make it both easy for her to understand the programme objectives and to carry out the programme activities.

For the child, the programme aims at enhancing the skills and knowledge that the Dutch elementary school assumes and expects him/her to have. Developmental areas, such as language development, fine motor and sensory development, are encouraged by providing and carrying out various types of play activities with the child.

By thus promoting the mother's responsive instruction behaviour, a range of the child's own skills are stimulated, such as perseverance, problem-solving, task-orientation and the ability to plan and carry out activities.

The programme lasts two years and has been roughly divided into two parts. During the first year the emphasis is on play and child development; the second year focuses on mother-child interaction. This division is expressed in the worksheets for the mother, the instruction sheets for the neighbourhood aides, the way of working during home visits and in the training of the neighbourhood aides.

Opstapje is primarily a home-based programme. This means among other things that it takes place largely in the home, and that the parent is given an active and responsible role. It consists of home visits, group meetings for the mother and participating in a playgroup for the children. The programme lasts two years. Each year consists of thirty weeks. The duration and frequency of the home visits differs per programme year.

Home sessions are led by the paraprofessional aide. She is responsible for supplying the programme materials, carrying out play activities with mother and child and for transferring information. For the mother, the paraprofessional aide functions as a role model of how to associate with the child.

The fortnightly group meetings are led by the project co-ordinator assisted by the neighbourhood aide. These meetings support mothers in carrying out and staying with the programme. They also support them with their children's upbringing. During the group meetings, the mothers discuss and are informed about topics such as child development, education, and various aspects of child-rearing. Another function of the meetings is to familiarize the mothers with neighbourhood facilities and services, such as playgroups, schools and toy and book libraries.

5. Opstap Opnieuw *(Leg-up, level II)*

Opstap Opnieuw is a home-based extra-curricular programme for children between four and six years of age from disadvantaged backgrounds and their parents.

The general objective is to adequately prepare these children for schooling. More specifically, the programme aims to stimulate language and cognitive development as well as socio-emotional development. Enhancing learning conditions by providing children with the knowledge and skills required for successful school learning goes alongside supporting pedagogical family interaction. Encouraging parental responsive behaviour is therefore a key element in the programme. A responsive child-oriented style of interaction has a positive impact on the child's socio-emotional and cognitive development and promotes skills, which are highly valued in the Dutch education system.

By providing activities and materials, parents learn to:

- respect their child's autonomy;
- praise and encourage their child's initiatives;
- provide structure and set limits on their child's behaviour.

Furthermore, they learn to support their child in carrying out and completing a task by organizing its attention and activity and to be sensitive to their child's competence in particular tasks so that responsibility is given to the child when he/she is able to handle it. The child can thus become an active learner.

Opstap Opnieuw lasts two years and consists of fortnightly home visits and group meetings. Most programme activities take place in the home environment as mother and child carry out these activities together. As in *Opstapje* a paraprofessional neighbourhood mother visits the parents every fourteen days to demonstrate the accompanying activities and materials. She instructs and supports the parent by role modeling, and other methods of transferring knowledge and skills.

The group meetings are led by the co-ordinator. The group discusses the programme materials and activities as well as themes regarding parent-child interaction and other aspects of child-rearing and education. The co-ordinator also trains and assists the paraprofessional aides.

Opstap Opnieuw consists of a script and a programme for group meetings supported by audio-visual materials, a materials box, worksheets for parents and children, children's books, a series of stories, and manuals for co-ordinators and neighbourhood aides.

6. Overstap *(Change over)*

Overstap is a programme which focuses on the collaboration between school, parents and children during the process of learning to read. It lasts one (school) year and aims at encouraging children and parents to read together in their home environment. The programme is closely linked with formal reading instruction in Dutch elementary schools.

Overstap is meant for all children in First Grade of elementary schools and their parents. Schools are responsible for carrying out the programme, actively involving children and their parents.

Children first learn to read certain characters and words at school. These are then repeated at home, on the assumption that this will enhance the process of consolidation. Therefore, parents and children are provided with specially developed home-based reading materials. The idea is that, about three times a week, parents and children will perform a range of playful reading activities in which reading aloud is strongly emphasized.

Materials consists of picture booklets in addition to written stories, so that parents who feel uncomfortable about reading aloud can still participate in the activities by enjoying the picture booklet with the child. In this way reading together is promoted as a caring and sharing time.

Group meetings for parents take place in the school every three weeks. These are led by the First Grade teacher who instructs the parents in the accompanying activities and materials. Group meetings aim at encouraging parents to read and learn with their children at home.

Research shows that the programme has a positive impact on children's verbal skills, their reading comprehension and passive vocabulary. *Overstap* not only enhances children's reading skills, but also enables parents to become familiar with and comfortable in the school environment. Moreover, it improves the relationship between parents and children through regular (reading) interaction.

7. Stap door (Keep on going)

Stap door! is a continuation of the Overstap programme. It is meant for Second and Fifth Grade pupils of Dutch elementary schools and their parents. As Second Grade pupils expand their reading skills, reading comprehension becomes increasingly important. *Stap door!* has been developed to support this phase in the process of learning to read. The programme consists of a school-based and a home-based component.

The school-based component aims at enhancing active reading skills and promoting reading pleasure. Peer-tutoring forms the heart of this component. Fifth Grade pupils, called tutors, are trained to support their Second Grade schoolmates during reading lessons. They read together and carry out specific reading activities. These half-hour reading lessons take place three times a week during one school year. Reciprocal learning thus occurs: both Fifth and Second Grade pupils have the opportunity to acquire positive reading experience. Besides, the explicit assignment of specific roles, tasks, and responsibilities to pupils promotes better relationships between pupils, while at the same time improving the social climate in school.

Special training is provided for Fifth Grade pupils before they start their tutoring activities. These training sessions focus on developing the social, communicative and didactic skills required for effective and constructive co-operation.

The home-based component of the programme encourages parents to support their children's learning and school education. Materials for parents and children consist of stories, audio-cassettes and booklets to engage parents and children in home reading activities. Parents are supported by regular group meetings in school.

8. Stap rond *(Move around)*

Stap rond is a parent education programme providing educational support to parents and/or caregivers of children from birth to six years of age. The programme is based on the Turkish 'Mother Enrichment Program' developed by the Bogaziçi University in Istanbul, Turkey. *Stap rond* aims at supporting parents/caregivers with their children's upbringing. It provides parents with knowledge and information to encourage their children's development, and increases parents' self-confidence and competence as educators.

Weekly group meetings take place in a local community centre. These are led by a professional or paraprofessional group leader who speaks the same language as the participating parents.

During these meetings, parents discuss certain themes related to child development, education, and other aspects of child-rearing. At the end of each meeting, participants agree on how they will apply newly acquired knowledge and skills in their daily home environment. At the next meeting, parents will share and discuss their experiences.

The programme has been divided into two parts. The first part focuses on themes concerning child development, health, and nutrition, as well as play and play development. During the second part, the emphasis is on mother-child interaction, discipline and communication. Both content and structure of the themes are extensively described in a well structured manual for the group leader. The same also applies to the transfer methods.

9. Kaleidoscoop *(Kaleidoscope)*

Kaleidoscoop is a teaching method for young children attending a playgroup and the first year of elementary school. It is the Dutch version of the American High/Scope programme. Its basic principle is that children should undergo certain experiences to optimize their development. These key experiences can be gained through active learning.

The method aims to foster the development of the child in the best possible way. Through *Kaleidoscoop*, children learn to work independently, to make and carry out plans, to get along with adults and other children and to solve problems, thus learning to think and develop self-confidence and a positive self-image. Studies have shown that *Kaleidoscoop* prepares children effectively for learning reading, writing, language and arithmetic.

Parental involvement is an important characteristic of this method. Parents are actually involved in what is going on in the playgroup or in school. Regular meetings are held for parents in which topics related to child development are discussed. Parents are offered materials in various languages which they can take home with them.

IV. Intervention programmes: from model to menu

The Averroès programmes have been explicitly presented as examples of practice, not as models. Thinking in models seems to have limited value. However carefully designed and tested, models appear to decrease in value the longer they last. Once they have left their experimental setting and the designers have left, their model features disappear as adjustments have to be made to the ever changing circumstances. Every group and every situation calls for its own kind of intervention. There are no standard models that can be applied across the board.

The cumulative and ongoing experience with intervention allows us to discover the underlying principles that inform and inspire these models, and to develop strategies pertinent for a particular situation. These principles, or rather guidelines, should be brought into the equation when intervention programmes are being developed. These principles should not be applied mechanically, but should rather be weighed against the constraints and possibilities of the local context. The metaphor of a 'cook book' might be appropriate here, with the good cook knowing exactly what ingredients to use for what occasion, and for what kind of eaters.

Key principles

- A minimum infrastructure has to be in place.
- Target groups need to participate in the design and control of programmes.
- Women should be fully involved.
- Activities should be environmentally sustainable.
- Programmes should include the 'poorest of the poor'.
- Development should be allowed to grow naturally; massive changes should not be introduced in one go.
- Social mobilization should support intervention programmes.

These statements probably apply to any intervention aimed at social development. These guidelines should constantly be reviewed in action with children and their families, and discussed with professional colleagues, lest they deteriorate into mere 'checklists'.

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Activities for children: some guidelines

Programmes should:

- be community-based and culturally relevant;
- include parents and recognize their needs;
- include non-formal education;
- be supported by competent management and a sound administrative structure;
- integrate child care and education, and focus on the 'whole child';
- accept the child as an active participant;
- realize the importance of increasing the knowledge base about children;
- and most importantly, accept that the well-being of children should be addressed in the context of the sum of human action.

V. Going to scale[3]

Within the Dutch context - the Netherlands is a small country - the Averroès programmes are considered to have scale dimensions. As mentioned above, the combination of good quality, extensive outreach, and short time-frame is unique. The success of Averroès in achieving both good quality and reaching many children could, to be cynical and critical, largely be explained by the presence of an interested and consistent donor: the Ministry of Social Welfare. It could be argued that without this financial lifeline, Averroès would either have to sacrifice on quality or on quantity. Only the future will tell; the early signs give the impression, however, that the approach followed by Averroès is well received and could survive without core funding. This approach combines an outspoken concern for the content of the programmes with a willingness to respond flexibly to local situations.

The dissemination of programmes to large numbers of takers is often an elusive assignment. This is even more so when the takers come from marginalized or otherwise 'unempowered' backgrounds. Here, increasing coverage of sustainable and effective programmes often appears a major struggle. Unlike a franchised, commercially disseminated product - think, for example, of a McDonalds hamburger - the supply and demand situation of Averroès' products is very different.

In the process of coming to grips with bringing to scale of its programmes, Averroès is learning a number of fundamental lessons. These lessons are:

- The observation that programmes do work is not enough. We need to understand why they have positive effects, under what conditions, and how they function. It is not sufficient to know that parental involvement works. Questions should be raised and answered such as: what mediating role do parents play between the child and the environment? What factors affect this role, and how do they differ for fathers and mothers ?

[3] *See for a more extensive discussion on this subject: Nico van Oudenhoven and Rekha Wazir, 'Replicating Social Programmes: Approaches, Strategies and Conceptual Issues'. UNESCO, Management of Social Transformation (MOST), Policy Papers, forthcoming.*

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- Averroès does not have a monopoly on knowledge. The users of its programmes are not empty receptacles incapable of creating their own knowledge. This requires giving validity to all forms of knowledge, be it of the researcher, the municipal officer, or the mother.
- Stakeholders should be identified and involved. There are strong economic, political, ethical, psychological and developmental arguments for investing in children. Good programmes benefit not only children, but virtually the whole of society. Everybody - individuals, political parties, the business community - has a 'stake' in the healthy development of children. They should be identified, made aware of their role and be involved.
- There is a need for an overall body to monitor the situation of children. At the most basic level, such a monitoring body should collect data on children's needs, the programmes available to them, numbers of participants, and on how many children are omitted or require special attention.
- Networks are often good vehicles for dissemination of programmes. This is especially so when they are multi-modal, loosely structured, and are vertically and horizontally linked to public and private organizations.

VI. Conclusions: Home-based or centre-based ?

It is only recently that Averroès has become involved with centre-based programmes. The Kaleidoscope programme has been in existence for a mere two years. It is probably fair to say that Averroès started with the belief that working with children and families at risk could best take place in a non-formal, almost informal manner. Formal approaches were deemed to be too expensive, insensitive, inflexible and too far removed from the worlds of the families to whom it sought to relate. Non-formal education permits extensive use of local resources wherever possible, especially cultural resources, and appreciates the role of parents, especially the mothers. It is also more needs-based, and places children and their families at the centre of attention.

Although non-formal education has long been seen as a response or an alternative to formal education, Averroès has used non-formal education first and foremost as a bridge between the family and the formal school. This is reflected in one of the key elements that is common to all its home-based programmes: the improvement of school performance. Home visiting is seen by Averroès as a particularly effective strategy, but it is neither exclusive nor sacrosanct. It has become clear that, in the final analysis, the development and needs of children determine the selection of services. For many children and families, centre-based programmes are ideally suited, and provide the most appropriate educational environment. It is possible that their more fixed structures work more as supporting elements than as obstacles.

The relationship between centre and home activity can be quite dynamic. Home-based groups may readily lead to the establishment of a centre, while the creation of a centre may give rise to a range of home-based and other non-formal education activities. The final decision about which programme is most suitable - whether it be centre-based, a mothers' group, distance learning, a parent education scheme, or a home visiting activity - cannot be taken by Averroès. It is a decision that should be taken by the children and their families.

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